



CONGRESSMAN HENRY A. WAXMAN NEWS

1721 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
8425 WEST 3rd STREET

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515
LOS ANGELES, CALIF. 90048

202-225-3976
213-651-1040

Washington Report
by HENRY A. WAXMAN
Congressman, 24th C.D., Calif.

March 25, 1981

REAGAN'S MEDI-CAL CUTS: WILL THEY WORK?

IS IT RIGHT?

President Reagan is seeking to cut federal payments to the Medi-Cal and Medicaid program by enormous amounts. The reductions would be about \$370 million this year and soar upward to \$5 billion by 1986. I am flatly and unalterably opposed to these cuts. As Chairman of the House subcommittee on Health and the Environment, I will fight for every last penny. I will not be bullied by talk of stopping inflation or holding down government spending. Medi-Cal cuts will accomplish neither of these goals.

If Reagan's cuts are enacted, I believe that within a fairly short period of time, we will experience an actual increase in the costs of health care. We will end up paying more money for fewer and less adequate health services.

My reasoning is very simple. With less money, Medi-Cal will try to maintain emergency and acute care services. Preventive and routine health care will deteriorate. One does not have to be a specialist in health policy to know that the less prevention and routine care, the more patients who wind up in the emergency room or in the phenomenally expensive intensive care units.

Diabetes can be routinely treated for pennies a day -- provided it is detected, appropriate drugs are prescribed, and the patient's health is routinely monitored. Neglected diabetes can result in gangrenous infections, amputations, blindness and life-threatening

.....more.....more.....more.....more.....

MEDI-CAL CUTS -- continued
March 25, 1981
Page Two.

diabetic comas. The cost of treating anyone of these complications of diabetes must be measured not in pennies but in tens of thousands of dollars.

Diseases which could have been controlled through routine health care can result in permanent disability. Productive citizens may be forced to end their useful functions as homemakers or workers.

I find it depressing and repulsive to write about life and death, human pain and suffering, strictly in terms of dollars and cents. President Reagan's budget cuts in Medi-Cal and other health programs has forced me to fight him on his own grounds: budgetary consequences. I want to make it clear to my readers, however, that even if I felt Medi-Cal cuts would save money rather than increase health care costs, I would oppose the cuts.

Twenty-three million Americans depend on the Medi-Cal and Medicaid program, (Outside of California, the Medi-Cal program is called Medicaid). Among these 23 million are the weakest, most dependent and most disadvantaged people in our entire society. Included in this group are millions of children from poor and fatherless families. Included in this group are the blind, physically handicapped, permanently disabled, mentally retarded, and those with serious emotional disturbances. These people need and deserve more help not less.

I want to eliminate wasteful government spending. Little Medi-Cal spending is wasteful. I want to reduce taxes. Medi-Cal cuts will only transfer taxes from the federal government to states and especially, county governments. In the long run we will pay a heavy price for shortsighted cutbacks in disease prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

Amidst all the talk of reduced spending, balanced budgets and austerity, let us not forget that this is, by far, the wealthiest society on the face of the earth. A society which spends hundreds of millions of dollars on roller skates, skis, cosmetics, cigarettes, and a myriad of other instruments of relaxation and recreation surely can afford basic health care for all its citizens.